

INSIGHT

Parents and Friends' Association - Parent Forum

The limit of our limitations

Unlocking the truth about performance

When you reflect on what has been collectively achieved in the last 40, 50 or 60 years alone a picture of immense growth and global advancement is revealed; a series of the seemingly impossible, made possible. In today's environment, it can be easy to attribute such advances to technology alone, and easy to forget that had someone not imagined up these possibilities, had they not dared to explore, been willing to make mistakes, to learn and redefine the status quo, much of what we know and value today would simply not exist.

According to educator and **Unleashing Personal Potential Founder, Luke McKenna** - who recently spoke with parents at the P&F's second Parent Forum - the legend of the four-minute mile highlights the power of perception and the role it has to play in performance and ultimately progress.

"In 1954 Englishman Roger Bannister and Australia's John Landy did what was considered impossible. They ran a mile in under four minutes. For years, many had happily accepted that the human body was simply incapable of anything beyond this. Scientists teamed with middle distant runners in an effort to find out more, only to affirm this widely held belief. They concluded that it was physically impossible for a human to run a mile in under four minutes and people chose to believe it," explained Luke.

"Yet as history would prove, it was simply a limitation people had set in their mind. As soon as the 'glass ceiling' was broken, the records started to tumble. It became possible. The limitation so many had set in their mind was not a real thing. Today, if you ran it in this time you would place last in the race," he said.

"It just goes to show the power of these limitations; our successful failures."

For Luke, when it comes to performance, and in the context of education, unlocking each student's potential, the answer lies in the mind and in fostering a growth mindset.



Our brains shape our perceptions. If students don't know what their brain is doing to them, their brain is always going to get to class before them. And what I mean by this is if they go in thinking, 'I hate this lesson' and are largely unaware of their own thoughts, this perception can become incredibly powerful and in this case destructive to their learning.

"Kids don't see the world as it is, they see it as they are."

"Ten years ago, we really didn't know much about what happens in the brain. Today, research paints a much clearer picture."

According to Luke this information has revealed three significant inhibitors to student improvement - a belief that our talents or intelligence are fixed traits; a lowered resilience in the face of setbacks and reduced recognition of persistent, focused effort; and student stress, anxiety and a general lack of mental health.

As an educator with more than 10 years experience, it's the first point that Luke is most passionate about.

“All of these inhibitors are inherently related. If we can address the issue of the fixed mindset however, this then flows into improving persistence and wellbeing. I bring it back to the student who thinks they are no good at maths. Why would you be persistent if you think that you don't have the ability to improve? Boys in particular often recognise the benefits of resilience, but not so much persistence. They don't always understand that it might take 10 years and believe that persistence is just doing short bouts of hard work.

“Or if they don't get the result they were hoping for a boy might say to himself, ‘I worked really hard and I didn't get the result’ attaching negative connotations to the experience and the idea behind persistence.

“These mindsets all manifest in behaviours.



American political theorist Benjamin Barber once said, ‘I don't divide the world into the weak and the strong. Or the successes and the failures. I divide the world into the learners and the non learners.’ The question we need to be asking our boys, and indeed ourselves is, ‘Are we moving forward, are we learners?’ This is the type of language we can pick up easily and start using at home to help foster a growth mindset.

“My mum would often use the saying, ‘You can't teach an old dog new tricks’. I don't know about dogs but for humans that is just not the case. It's this style of thinking that we need to remove. It was ok some 20 years ago, because we simply didn't know what we do today.

“While brains are still more receptive at certain ages, the latest research tells us our brain is spongy our entire life. We can choose where we want our brain to grow and it can adapt. It's like a muscle – it adapts, that's what our brain does.

“But we have to choose where we want our brain to go and where we want our brain to grow. We need to cultivate a growth mindset. And this is the key to building resilient young men.”

FIXED VS GROWTH MINDSET

Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, Carol Dweck, a pioneering researcher in the area of mindset, provides the following definitions in relation to students with fixed vs growth mindsets.

In a fixed mindset students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that's that...

In a growth mindset students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence. They don't necessarily think everyone's the same... but they understand everyone can get smarter if they work at it.

TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

So how can you as a parent, help your son cultivate a growth mindset?

“Effort is the friend of the growth mindset,” says Luke.

“Older students may be particularly vulnerable to not wanting to be seen as putting in effort, particularly if they don't win but this type of attitude can prohibit them from adapting the growth mindset,” he said.

“It's important for them to realise that it can take 10 years to become an overnight success. That it takes 10,000 hours to refine a pathway in the brain so neatly and so nicely that it almost becomes second nature. That's how people make it look easy, like they were born to do it.

“Effort is the multiplier of talent. It's not about saying we don't have natural talents or strengths; but about acknowledging the power of focused effort.

“Sometimes it's even helpful for a younger person to finish second, third or fourth and not first. Particularly for those who are used to doing so. It's good to win, if your mindset is ‘I'm winning because I'm working’. Be careful with the praise you give, and loading that with expectation.”

PERSON VS PROCESS PRAISE

“In 1996 Carol Dweck and fellow researcher Claudia Mueller asked parents if they thought they should praise children for their natural abilities. It was at the end of the self-esteem era where ‘everyone got a prize’ and 85 percent said yes. Eighty-five percent were wrong. This is not a constructive way to assist with improvement.”

According to Luke parents should praise the effort, not the person.

WHAT DOES PROCESS PRAISE LOOK LIKE?

PERSON PRAISE

Great job! You must be smart at this.

See, you are good at English. You got an A on your last test.

You got it! I told you that you were smart.

PROCESS PRAISE

Great job! You must have worked really hard.

You really studied for your English test and your improvement shows it.

I like the way you tried all kinds of strategies on that math problem until you finally got it.

MUELLER, C. M., & DWECK, C. S. (1998). PRAISE FOR INTELLIGENCE CAN UNDERMINE CHILDREN'S MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE. *JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY*, 75(1), 33-52. GUNDERSON, E.A., GRIPSHOVER, S.J., ROMERO, C., DWECK, C.S., GOLDIN-MEADON, S., & LEVINE, S.C. (2013). PARENT PRAISE TO 1- TO 3-YEAR-OLDS PREDICTS CHILDREN'S MOTIVATIONAL FRAMEWORKS 5 YEARS LATER. *CHILD DEVELOPMENT*, 84, 1526-1541.



In a four year study which compared children who received process praise vs those who received person praise, Children who received a greater proportion of process praise [tended] to believe that the 'sources of their accomplishments are effort and deliberate practice', whereas children who hear a greater proportion of person praise [tended] to believe that the sources of their accomplishments are fixed traits."

"In our house," says Luke "the word clever is out of bounds, as is the word smart. I always endeavour to praise my son not because he has done something quickly or well but by how hard he is trying.

"When we value the process more than the person, this is more beneficial to helping boys to improve."

Even Kung Fu Panda had it right when he said, "If you only do what you can do, you'll never be more than you are now."

LANGUAGE FOR CULTIVATING A GROWTH MINDSET

Language is a powerful tool and according to Luke, one of the keys to cultivating a growth mindset in children. Luke encourages parents to visit the MindSet Kit (mindsetkit.org) which provides examples, such as the following, on how they can assist their child in various circumstances.

When your boy succeeds easily without effort

- *It's great that you have that down. Now we need to find something a bit more challenging so you can grow.*
- *We need to raise the bar for you now.*
- *You're ready for something more difficult.*
- *What topic would you like to learn more about next?*

When your boy succeeds with strong effort

- *I am so proud of the effort you put into this. I am very proud of you for not giving up, and look what you have to show for it!*
- *I want you to remember for a moment how challenging this was when you began. Look at how far you have come!*
- *All that hard work and effort paid off! What choices did you make that you think contributed to your success?*

When they struggle and need help with strategies

- *Let's think about how to improve (the accuracy of) this paragraph/sentence/description/calculation.*
- *Just try – we can always fix mistakes after we give it a go.*
- *What parts were difficult for you? Let's look at them.*
- *Let's write a plan for practicing and/or learning.*

When they struggle despite strong effort

- *OK, so you didn't do as well as you wanted to. Let's look at this as an opportunity to learn.*
- *When you think you can't do it, remind yourself that you can't do it...yet.*
- *Look at how much progress you made on this. Do you remember how much more challenging this was (yesterday/last week/last year)?*
- *If it were easy you wouldn't be learning anything! I admire your persistence and I appreciate your hard work. It will pay off.*

RESOURCE

11 steps to success: navigating assignments

BBC's Head of Teaching and Learning, Barry Dean and Head of Information Services, Jennifer King also spoke briefly on the evening in relation to assignments. Here they share the 11 steps boys should be taking when it comes to completing assignments.

1. THE 15 MINUTE OVERVIEW

A 15-minute overview involving a careful review of the assignment information, highlighting key points along the way. These key points include:

- When is the assignment due?
.....
- What is the purpose of the assignment?
.....
- What is the assignment asking you to do?
.....
- What presentation format is required?
.....
- Are there any guidelines or directions to follow?
.....
- Are there specific references/resources given?
.....
- Is there a marking criteria? How will the assignment be graded?
.....

2. PERFECTING THE PROCESS

Thinking about everything that needs to be done for the assignment and this will vary depending on what type of assignment it is. For example:

- Read the assignment, make points, do a schedule
.....
- Check library, general research
.....
- Review. Outline what I need to research
.....
- List topics/headings to research
.....
- Last pre-research check
.....
- Start researching
.....
- Continue researching
.....
- Finish researching
.....
- Begin writing a draft (a third)
.....
- Write the second third of the draft
.....
- Write the final third of the draft
.....
- First proof, second proof, third proof
.....
- Final format completed
.....

3. SCHEDULING

A schedule needs to be created:

- Immediately draw up a schedule, or add to the homework diary, to make it possible to do all other homework and tasks, as well as the assignment planning.
.....
- Add in other commitments to create a realistic schedule.
.....
- Leave a good amount of time between finishing the draft and having the assignment completed for submission. This allows for the unexpected, or for some parts of the process taking longer than expected.
.....
- The schedule is not fixed. It should be changed if planning deadlines are not met. Just make sure that the last important stage of the presentation is not rushed.
.....

4. SEEKING CLARITY

To ensure clarity on what to research, check the following:

- What needs to be known?
.....
- Are there main points, concepts, words or topics? These should be indicated on the assignment questions, as well as the knowledge related to the topic. Write them down.
.....
- What are other ways to describe these key words, phrases or concepts – are there synonyms? This will help when using search engines or catalogues. Add these to the list of words or phrases from the previous point.
.....
- What is known already?
.....
- Is there anything that should be checked and confirmed?
.....

5. DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK

Structure what needs to be known:

At this point boys should have a fairly good idea of the general direction of the research and how to approach the assignment.

The next step is to give further structure before researching more deeply. This will make research organisation far easier.

Main headings and sub-headings should be determined; personal ideas under those headings and key words to be used in searches.

6. ORGANISING RESEARCH

Decide how to organise the research collected:

Write/type notes during research.

Cut and paste from online sources. Then highlight and underline relevant information (**but** remember this process does not constitute notes, so generate notes from this process).

Photocopy and do the same.

7. RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS

Do not forget the following:

Library: The library is incredibly valuable in providing boys with access to a significant amount of resources.

Citing: Whenever words, ideas or images are used that are from the sources, it is necessary to state where they came from, even if it was from a website. Therefore, it is necessary to keep notes on sources as the research progresses as it will be difficult later to find where the information came from.

Bibliography: At the end of the assignment it is necessary to include a bibliography that lists all the sources referred to, and that helped in understanding more about the topic and provided general information.

Timeline: Lastly, check your timeline, are you on track?

8. BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now is the time to start the research, organise the relevant information, make notes and be fully prepared to write the assignment. Note: If using your computer to complete these next stages back up all your work regularly.

Have sub headings and topics and the question clearly visible as the research progresses so a focus on the points is maintained.

Write notes in your own words as you research (add where you originally got the information from, in case you need to cite later). When writing notes in your own words, it will make writing the assignment a lot easier.

9. IT'S TIME TO WRITE

When writing the assignment:

Unless told otherwise, assignments can have headings, flow charts, bullet points, highlighting, images and diagrams.

Introduction: The introduction should immediately address the assignment question. This should include: what you are going to discuss or describe or explain; the purpose of the assignment, indicating how the question will be answered and get the reader's attention.

Body: The body is where you include all your points, ideas, themes, arguments and concepts. You should not do this in a day, but over a series of days and sessions (refer to your schedule). Here, all topics, headings and sub-headings will be developed into written text, with visual images to reinforce points.

Conclusion: The conclusion is where you succinctly reinforce your argument, answer or explanation. It will be the last words your teacher will read before assessing your assignment so you want him or her to finish reading with a strong impression.

10. CROSS CHECK AND REFLECT

Proofing the assignment:

First proof: Do the first proof, checking the word count, spelling and grammar. Check that all the visuals have the sources listed. Are the criteria addressed and has the question been answered? Is there unnecessary information or repetition that could be removed?

Second proof: Read the assignment out loud to see if you can find other mistakes that have been missed.

Third proof: Ask someone to have a quick read through your work looking for errors. If errors are found, learn from that.

11. THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Bibliography: List the references used in a bibliography and list them alphabetically.

Formatting: Pay attention to font size; page breaks; alignment; page numbers; title page.

Submission: Note teacher requirements. Save your final assignment on a back-up drive.